

Soviet Would Widen Talks Asked by U.S. on Missiles

By HEDRICK SMITH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 21—United States officials said today that the Soviet Union had indicated it preferred to broaden discussions of a proposed limitation of antimissile defenses. Moscow, according to these officials, has suggested that the talks take up the even more complex problem of limiting offensive missile systems.

The Soviet Union has already begun installing antimissile defenses around Moscow and possibly other sites. The Administration, under pressure from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to follow suit, has delayed taking such a step while seeking an agreement with Moscow for a moratorium on the deployment of antimissile defenses.

In his State of the Union address last month, President Johnson urged such a moratorium to prevent another costly spiral in the East-West arms race.

A State Department spokesman asserted that Moscow was showing continuing interest in seeking some "understanding" on "strategic missile problems," including both defensive and offensive weapons.

Robert J. McCloskey, the spokesman, said that Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin discussed President Johnson's "proposal" for limitations on antimissile defenses Saturday with Amba-

Continued on Page 10, Column 4

sador Llewellyn E. Thompson. He said Washington expected "further contacts with the Russians on this matter."

"These continuing contacts reflect interest on both sides in arriving at an understanding on exploring possibilities of arriving at strategic missile problems," Mr. McCloskey said.

Mr. Kosygin said on his recent visit to London that defensive systems were designed to save human lives and thus were less objectionable than offensive systems. But he did not reject the American suggestion of an outright missile freeze.

Last Wednesday a commentator in Pravda quoted Mr. Kosygin as having said that Moscow was willing to discuss curtailment of the arms race both in the field of offensive and defensive weapons. On the following day, the Soviet Foreign Ministry privately said the Pravda article was mistaken and left the impression that Moscow was cool, if not actually hostile, to a moratorium on defensive missile systems.

Officials noted that two weeks

ago both the United States and the Soviet Union submitted general disarmament plans, dealing with limitations on offensive weapons, to the disarmament conference at Geneva. But the officials conceded that discussions of these proposals had not made any significant progress.

Officials said privately that in recent contacts Moscow appeared to be saying that an agreement concerned only with limiting the deployment of antimissile systems would not be acceptable.

These officials report that the Russians have sought to deflect the American proposal on defensive missiles into consideration of the broader and more complex question of limiting offensive missile inventories as well. Because this goes to the heart of the entire subject of disarmament, some Government experts see little chance for an early agreement to limit antimissile defenses.

These experts, who declined to be identified, rated prospects for such a freeze as "not very high."

The result, according to some civilian officials in the Administration, is expected to be greater pressure from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their supporters in Congress for the United States to go ahead with installation of a limited antimissile defense system in the United States.

antimissile defense system in the United States.

The cost of an American antimissile defense has been estimated by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara at between \$5-billion to \$40-billion, depending on how extensive the defensive system is to be.

United States officials said that because of its desire to hold down such expenditures, the Administration was eager to keep the Soviet leadership engaged in discussions on limiting antimissile defenses.

At the same time, Washington does not want to embarrass those Soviet leaders who may be sympathetic to a freeze on missile expenditures but are opposed by the Soviet military leadership.

Gen. Pavel F. Batitsky, a Soviet Deputy Minister of Defense, said yesterday that Moscow's antiballistic missile system would protect the Soviet Union from attack. Another high officer, Gen. Pavel A. Kurochkin, said missiles fired at the Soviet Union would never reach their targets.

American analysts were inclined to discount such statements as military propaganda timed to coincide with Soviet armed forces celebrations and possibly also to convince the Soviet regime to extend development of Russian antimissile systems.